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THE REAL AND THE IDEAL IN HISTORY.

OUR historians are going about destroying our heroes. They have sadly mutilated some of mine. Have yours escaped unscathed? Aroused from our quiet mood of happy contemplation by the rude shock they have given us, let us investigate. Many of the men engaged in this unfeeling attack are counted among the most eminent and worthy of our historians. Is the opinion correct? Are our historical students interpreting ever more accurately and truly the story of the past? If so, is hero worship inconsistent with the truth of history, something which true historians may not tolerate in themselves or in other people? Or is it possibly our fault, in that we have not truly understood what heroes are and how they are to be used? If we have been in error, have we been altogether in error? May it not be that there is a field for the ideal in history alongside of the most exacting demands of those who are winnowing out the errors and testing the truth of history?

What is history? May I presume to say that it is the story of the past as known and comprehended by the human understanding? Sometimes we say, absolutely, without qualification, that it is the record of the past. But if that is so, then what we have is not history; for our record of the past is incomplete as to facts and inaccurately interpreted and subject to constant correction as to both facts and interpretation. Jefferson's draft of the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798, containing the word "nullification," was found in 1831, six years after the author's death, and about one year after Madison, relying on an old man's memory, had denied that it contained the fateful doctrine. Barely two generations ago Ranke, the great German historian, began to write universal history in a way that illumined the past with a new meaning and reflected a searching light upon the problems of the present day. It is not long since that Morgan, the great American

anthropologist, unraveled the clan organization of the American Indians and gave us the cue by which to understand the institutions of the peoples of that stage of civilization the world over. Only a few years ago Aristotle's Athenian Constitution was rediscovered; and, later still, Polk's Diary, throwing a sinister light upon the declaration of war against Mexico, was made public. A few years ago the religious world was shocked at the results proclaimed by the higher critics, who had just turned their methods of criticism upon the original text of the Scriptures. They gave a new and wholesome light upon some portions of biblical history. Their conclusions upon certain points have thus far stood the test and have won general acceptance. But they were overambitious; they tried to prove too much, with the result that they have brought their methods into discredit and under some suspicion. Certain of the statements of the Bible record which they challenged have in these later years been confirmed by the Assyriologists, who have discovered and deciphered trustworthy contemporaneous records in the Mesopotamian Valley. What we call history, then, is only what mankind, for the time, knows and believes about the past experiences of the race. In the proportion that it approximates the truth and reality of things it is profitable, like the Scriptures, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, and in proportion that it sets forth wholesome ideals it stirs men to emulation and inspires them with a devotion to noble principles.

You know the answer which physicists give us when we ask them: What is light? They say that if there were no eyes there would be no light. They tell us that the ether has an undulatory motion, that one set of ether waves has the power of producing upon the retina and the optic nerve the sensation which we call light. But close your eyelids, protect your eyes from these waves, and you will not have the sensation. Still the light waves will have existed just the same; and wherever there is a natural eye exposed to them, be it of man or beast, bird or insect, there will be light. So

the past is full of events, and every moment it is becoming more crowded with them. Some of them have little or no historic value or force; others have much. Is the organ through which we receive our historical impressions in range of and exposed to their influence? Plainly the first rule of historical study must be to bring the facts within the range of our vision. What were the motives which, for instance, led Constantine to make Rome a Christian State? How many of the most essential facts can we get together? How nearly do they amount to a complete demonstration? What allowance must we make for influences which may have been present but are now beyond our power to recall?

In this point of gathering the facts, certainly, modern historians are showing a zeal that is born of wisdom. When England and Venezuela were bitterly disputing over their territorial claims in South America, how the dingy Dutch archives were opened to the commissioners whom President Cleveland appointed to investigate, in the hope thereby to avert an impending war! The success of that Commission was no less conspicuous in the field of history than in that of diplomacy. Historians are searching high and low for the letters and diaries of the men who were themselves a part of the things which they wrote, trying to rescue the records from the destruction by fire and dampness and vermin and sheer neglect to which they are imminently exposed in private hands. It is an utter misconception of the true relation of things which leads many people to keep such documents stored away in dark corners of private houses. Sentiment and historical value are the only two motives which can keep them from the dust pile at all. Now, they are of no historical value unless they are known and accessible and used by historical students; and would not one be doing greater honor to his ancestor, and to himself as well, to put them in a public repository where public recognition could be given to both? The Calhoun letters which the American Historical Association recently published were gathered by Prof. Jameson from the very borders of the continent; and another authentic diary of a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition has

been located on the Pacific Coast, where it is now held for ransom.

So the work of collecting material is going on apace, and this follows as a corollary: We must not be too sure that our current historical ideas are absolutely true and that the last word has been said on the matter. We must be prepared to change, if necessary, and accept a new view if it comes to us sufficiently demonstrated to satisfy good critics and competent judges. Not to do so would mark us as narrow and prejudiced, unscientific, untrue to the standards of our profession, willfully blind, misleading those who are looking to us to be shown the truth.

Again, what the past shall mean to us depends largely upon our point of view, our conception of the world, our *Weltanschauung*, as the Germans say. It makes a difference through what sort of a medium the light comes to us. Some media obscure, and others refract the rays. You know the impudent tricks of the concave and the convex lenses. The wonderful little prism will analyze a ray of light into the seven colors of the rainbow. But suppose that you were so located that only the red color, or only the blue, reached you when, without the prism, you would get the effect of all at once—i. e., white light.

To the clergy of the Dark Ages classic Latin literature was pagan and harmful, and they discarded it. But they had nothing to put in place of it. Indeed, they did little to ameliorate the common, everyday life of the people. They put all emphasis upon such a conformity to the rules of the Church as they taught people to believe would insure entrance into the happiness prepared in the world beyond for those who died in its fold. When this theological way of looking at things broke down before the influx of Greek learning and culture, Europe experienced an intellectual upheaval, a conversion, and a new birth. Men became more kind and human. They began anew to look upon this world as a place to live in and enjoy, not as a place of lifelong penance and a place to die out of, the sooner the better. The rediscovered literature of the Greeks and the Romans they

called the "humanities," because its effects were so humanizing; and to this day the "humanities" have maintained their place in the college curriculum as the typical culture study.

In the eighteenth century, in the universities of France and Germany, the natural sciences were studied with a new success. University students turned to them with the zest of novelty and learned to look upon nature with new eyes. They were astonished at the revelation of her forces and her laws. The effect was to promote, even to exaggerate, materialism. Voltaire, Diderot, and other encyclopedists were influenced by it. They used it to undermine the sway of authority in religion and caste in politics, substituting natural law and human reason instead. The utilitarian philosophy of Locke, and the selfish individualism of which Adam Smith was such a conspicuous exponent affected current theories upon political and social questions for several generations in England and America.

Since Darwin's time we have come to look upon society as something organic and evolutionary. Sociology, the study of society by groups and not by individuals, is in vogue now and doing much to confirm its right to the prominence it has achieved; and just as the biologist studies the differentiation of functions and the development of organs in plant and animal life, so the modern historian feels obliged to take his stand at the sociological point of view and restudy the old problems and revise the conclusions of the old individualistic philosophy in the light of new conceptions, new knowledge, and new methods.

Another maxim of historical interpretation, the value of which the modern historian appreciates, is the necessity of making a correction for the point of view and the personal equation of our sources and our authorities. Herodotus discredited the ancient story of the circumnavigation of Africa on the very ground that now serves to convince us of its authenticity. Mitford's "History of Greece," says a trustworthy critic, "is merely a huge party pamphlet." "He could praise tyrants and abuse liberty in a manner that was sure to interest his readers." "He hated the popular party

of Athens as he hated the Whigs of England." (C. K. Adams, "Manual of Historical Literature," third edition, p. 98.) On the other hand, Grote was "a decided liberal in politics." He exerted "a manifest effort to counteract the influence of such historians as Mitford." "One of the obvious motives of Grote," says the same authority (p. 97), "was to display the inspiring influence of political freedom on the actions of human intelligence." The one used Grecian history to show the weaknesses and defects of democracy; the other used facts from the same storehouse, to a great degree even the same facts, to show how liberty inspires men and ennobles them. In fact, both lessons are there, and the broad-minded, judicious, and trained historian will bring them both out. Liberty is inspiring. Democracy is the best form of government. But it is also the most difficult to keep in order; and a Grecian tyranny may promote many fine arts, even though at the price of individual liberty. Each of these historians told a truth, but he told the half of a truth for the whole. Moreover, each had a conscious motive in writing, a thesis to maintain. Such partial views need to be corrected; and it would be tedious to enumerate the men who have presumed to rewrite classical history, European history, English history, and even American history, each later one professing to have, and no doubt having, a clearer, truer view of the realities of things than his predecessors.

No one of us, I feel sure, is, at the bottom of his heart, likely to doubt seriously that the historians of to-day are as a class better equipped and better trained than their predecessors have been, less guilty of narrow views and biased judgments. There is a rather strong presumption that modern historical writers have something to say which it is worth our while to heed. The modern historian is trained to proceed after the manner of the natural scientist. Mr. J. F. Rhodes, ex-President of the American Historical Association, who is devoting himself to the task of writing the "History of the United States since the Compromise of 1850," devotes an average of three years, I am told, to the preparation of each volume.

The material must be gathered voluminously and exhaustively; it must be studied, analyzed, classified, and weighed. The first draft must give place to a revision and a re-revision. Statements must be verified, and the whole must be submitted to competent critics before the final revision is made. No fault would be considered more damning than to have neglected, willfully or carelessly, some item of evidence, with the result that an opinion contrary to fact was maintained. He must be sure that he holds a neutral position, letting the facts speak for themselves, not speaking for them. Not only is there needed impartiality as between opposing opinions, but breadth of historical conception and interpretative power to exploit the material to the utmost.

Thus the modern historical science is consciously striving to become truer to the realities of the past than ever before. Its demonstrations are generally so clear that we must accept them even when they are unwelcome, when they unmask our heroes, even when, to adapt the architectural metaphor of Charles Dudley Warner, they make it publicly manifest that our Queen Anne fronts have Mary Ann rears; for that is one of the disturbing things they are doing. They have given us recently a life of the "true" George Washington in contrast with, and even in protest against, the current ideas of his perfections. There is also a life of the real Thomas Jefferson, and a "true" history of the American Revolution. Indeed, one publisher has overdone the business. Trying to exploit a motive which has a certain merit in it, he has given us a whole series of "true" histories, causing us to suspect that the books are rather seasoned to sell to a curious and possibly morbid public than written to vindicate the honor of science and the truth of history.

We have been told that Lincoln was but a chip on the political wave; that Jackson was more obstinate than wise; that the war of 1812 was a dismal diplomatic and military failure; that Thomas Jefferson was a plagiarist, and, besides, wrote sentiments about equality which are not true and have been the cause of much of our political woe; and even that our Revolutionary forefathers were presumptuous radicals and

fractious rebels against English rule. We may not be entirely ready to accept these iconoclastic deliverances as the final word on the matter. But, harsh as they sound, they have been said so clearly as to convict us of having hitherto held narrow views, of having looked at great movements from only one side. Still, must we give up all of our heroes? Is there nothing at all left to idealize? Is there not a function for the ideal in history alongside of the most thoroughly, exactly, and scientifically tested realities of the past?

I think that those of us who are also teachers are clear on one point of our experience—viz., the usefulness of heroes in teaching great truths. Objectify a great principle in the person of a public character, let him suffer patiently, endure bravely, serve faithfully unto the end, and his life will enforce the lesson as precept and exhortation cannot do.

People of all times have had their heroes. Of some peoples only the tradition of their heroes remains; most of their real history has been lost. Their heroes are noble and inspiring, though of the uplifting influence of their real history we may well have some doubt. Their heroes were the best thing they had to leave. Indeed, one of the realities of the past, which every historian has to take into account, is the fact that heroes and ideals have exerted an uplifting and molding influence, have actually been historical forces. Of such an institution, then, as hero worship, with such an experience and such a record, we may well venture to infer that its survival until now confirms its right still to survive.

But there is one thing we must not expect of our heroes. They were human, not divine or superhuman, and we must expect to find them in reality like other men, human and imperfect. If I should hold up before you two objects, the one a turned and polished ivory ball, a perfect sphere, and the other a rough cobblestone of the same general dimensions, but with irregular surfaces, protruding here, flattened there, I could call the one the symbol of the perfect human character, which exists nowhere, the other the type of the real human character, an actual man. In some respect, in some one phase of his character perhaps, he might be a fully

rounded man, fulfilling admirably his task in life. But on some other side he would be found to be undeveloped and weak; and were he unfortunately tested on that side, he would very likely make a tragic failure. Indeed, sometimes I feel that the only difference between the man who failed and the one who succeeded may lie in the circumstance that the one was tested on his weak side and the other on his strongest.

On the other hand, there are several things which we do expect of our heroes. We do expect the display of some noble virtues, of conspicuous nobility of character in some one direction at least. We expect of them, further, the accomplishment of some achievement beyond the ability of ordinary men; and generally it must be some achievement redounding to the benefit of society—the display, *i. e.*, of some public virtue, rather than of some individual or private virtue—though this is not always so. These three qualifications all of our heroes, I think, will be found to possess: George Washington, the Great King Alfred, Cincinnatus, Julius Cæsar, Napoleon, Luther, Casabianca, William Tell, King Arthur of the Table Round.

It makes little difference, so far as our immediate purpose is concerned, whether these are real historical characters or the creation of tradition and myth. Indeed, no one of our heroes, as we think of them, is a real man. They have all been more or less idealized. We abstract from the historic personalities of our conspicuous men those qualities in which they displayed particular excellence; and out of the impression made upon our mind by these virtues, and according thereto, we create our heroic conception, even imputing equal excellence in all other points of character, if we are not careful to restrain ourselves from so doing. This idealized man, this personified virtue, is our hero, our pride, and our inspiration. The temper and profanity of Washington, the sinister ambition of Napoleon, do not prevent us from making heroes of them, since the public virtues which they possessed were so conspicuous.

To the first of these processes, that of abstracting the con-

spicuous virtues from the inconspicuous ones and from the positive weaknesses, I can see no objection; and I think that it is evident, upon simple reflection, that it is a common habit with us. The abstraction of the qualities or attributes in which we are for the time particularly interested is a process with which we are quite familiar in philosophy, in science, in art, and in literature. The familiar phrase of scientific argument, "other things being equal," "other things remaining the same," is a case in point. We believe, and we act upon the conviction, that other characteristics for the time and for the purpose in hand may be disregarded, or may be treated as neutral, as doubtless they may if they are not too obtrusively inconsistent and too fundamentally involved; and so we subordinate them to the abstracted ones, to which we look for our final conception.

But when we go farther and impute equal excellence in other particulars, imputing a perfection which is contrary to the fact; when we conceive our hero, or permit others to conceive him, as a man as perfect in every point as he is in the special points—we do something very human, perhaps; but nevertheless we commit a serious, illogical error, and one which is often of great pedagogical embarrassment. It is very easy to create the impression; it is perhaps very difficult to prevent the mistaken impression being formed, that excellence in several particulars implies excellence in all, that praise for one quality involves full and complete commendation. The teacher may thus easily mislead the pupil who, upon further enlightenment regarding the personal character of the hero, is shocked and confronted with a serious moral dilemma: either to surrender his heroes altogether or to think lightly of serious faults, neither of which conclusions is intended or necessary, or should be allowed to stand.

In truth, it is not the men whom we honor, but the virtues which they exemplify; it is the men as personifications of these virtues, and in conscious disregard of any other personal quality whatever. Washington was not the saint he was once represented to be; neither was he superhumanly descended

from the Anglo-Saxon gods, as my old history used to suggest somewhat dubiously. But the military sagacity and imperturbable deliberation with which through seven long years he used a weak army so as to wear out a stronger foe; his faith in the worthiness of his country's cause; his courage and perseverance through difficulties; his profound sense of responsibility; his sound judgment, discreet common sense, and wonderfully wise counsel; and his broad statesmanship—these are virtues as grand as the cause in which they were displayed. There are some things about the war of the Revolution of which we cannot be proud: the jealousies in the army, and the selfishness and lack of a spirit of mutual support among the States. But in the virtue of Washington's character we find a type of the exalted spirit and noble purpose in which such a cause should be conceived.

The oppression of England was serious only in prospect, scarcely at all in fact; the Tories were not such a despicable set of people after all. Many of them were the kind of conservative men, experienced in public affairs, whose advice on any other subject we would treat with consideration and accept with confidence; they were the very class of men upon whom we rely as a bulwark against radicalism. Some of this class were on the side of the colonists, too; but it was the mob of stamp destroyers who, in 1763, were dubbed "Sons of Liberty;" and it was the rebellious colonists who won the right to be called patriots, because out of their travail a new nation was born into life, and the result of their struggles was a beneficent democracy to bless the world. Freedom, independence, nationality—what a halo these words have thrown about even the commonest of the men who took part in that movement for popular self-government! And we cannot call them heroes without ourselves being stirred and stimulated to nobler things in behalf of the same principles.

Napoleon tricked President Madison; he pretended to give him bread, but gave him a stone instead. Seeing that Madison would take him at his word in matters of diplomacy, he deliberately ignored his word, and thus precipitated us into war with England by his own wanton and insulting breach

of honor. When once the war was begun, it was carried on with ill success, and was the occasion of quarrels and dissensions among the parties and the States, leading up to the very threshold of nullification and secession. And when finally peace was made, not a single guarantee did England give that sailors' rights and neutral trade would not be violated on occasion in the future as they had been in the past. But consider these things: In 1793, when war broke out between England and France, Washington proclaimed the neutrality of the United States as between the two belligerents. This was a novel doctrine in international law, that a nation could be neutral and that its neutrality must be respected. More than a century of experience has convinced the world of the wisdom of the principle and has brought honor upon the nation which first proclaimed it. But at the time neither England nor France showed much respect for the United States or consideration for her wishes. They despised her and bullied her, and they used her, each as a cat's-paw against the other. If France was the meaner, England was the greater bully; and the young nation resented it and has always felt more self-respect for having done so. When peace had been made—if not because of the war, at least after it was over—the United States began to enjoy a consideration abroad, among the nations of Europe, which it had not enjoyed before, but which has increased from that day to this. New industries had taken foothold during the war, and grew apace. Commerce increased. The hopeless of other lands began to come to us to kindle the lamp of hope anew. Clay's American system, though it may not have been built on the soundest principles of economic science, not inaptly exemplified the nation's growing consciousness of latent strength and self-dependence. Moreover, the war had not been altogether without inspiring incidents. England was considered the mistress of the seas, but American vessels were better built and better rigged. They were better handled and sailed faster. The Americans were the better sailors and better gunners. Nor were we altogether without honor on the land. What wonder that Hull's dis-

honor at Detroit and the fiasco before Washington were dropped out of mind, and that the Hartford Convention was remembered only to blast, like an early frost, the political ambitions of those who took part in it! What wonder that in the years and decades following the war men remembered only the "Constitution" and the "President," Rodgers and Decatur, Lawrence and Perry, and the consummate skill of Jackson and his men, who, after defeating a savage foe in the forests of Alabama, showed their superiority over the trained soldiers of England in the series of battles from the 23d of December to the 8th of January. In these men and in these deeds people saw the types of the greatness which they felt was in them and to which as individuals, as citizens, and as a nation they might aspire.

It would be pleasant to continue and to consider other national heroes who have achieved greatness in peace and in war, in statecraft, and in the calmer fields of industry. But the space is not at my disposal; and, besides, if what has been said has not sufficed to set forth the thought which I have deemed of sufficient interest to offer, I fear that further discussion would be fruitless on my part. Is it or is it not a stimulating thought to look upon history as what we know and believe about the past, as something, therefore, which we may come to know as time goes on with a fuller knowledge and a deeper understanding? Is there or is there not something helpful in the thought that, however stern and uncompromising, however much of the earth earthy the realities of history may be, there have been times and occasions when nations and when individuals in the public service attained to heights of grand achievement and noble purpose which have become for us the ideals to which we may worthily aspire as their successors and emulators?

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